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Approved For Release 2003/08/27 : CIA-RDP57-00012A000600220006-7
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Elaboration and Discussion

Problem

A. The general problem is to devise a procedure for the evaluation of students in Agency training courses. This procedure is to have the following characteristics:

1. It should be flexible in the sense that it can be readily adapted to meet the particular requirements of various courses, various class sizes, various consumer needs, etc.
2. It should be realistic. It should not make unreasonable or impossible demands upon instructors, and it should not promise or pretend to give more information than it can reliably provide. Forms and procedures should be simple.
3. It should be meaningful in providing information stated in clear, unambiguous terms.
4. It should protect the student against unfairness both in the making of evaluations and in the dissemination of evaluation reports to others.
5. It should be an integrated part of a career program, designed to contribute to a cumulative record of an individual's Agency service.

B. The immediate and specific goal is to devise an evaluation procedure for trial use in the Basic Intelligence Course which begins April 6.

Discussion

In devising the system every effort was made to incorporate the ideas of instructors, training officials, training liaison officers, and line supervisors as gained from a series of interviews. Considerable attention was given to the problems of balancing the needs of consumers against what instructors felt could be realistically evaluated. Tab D is a summary of the results of the interviews. The next several paragraphs summarize the major problems considered and the principals adopted.

A. What should be evaluated? A primary purpose of any training evaluation is to show what and how much a student has learned in the course. A secondary but still important purpose is to obtain both incidental and systematic observations of behaviors or characteristics which can be of value in career planning. Which specific subject matters or skills should be taught is a matter for appropriate training officials to determine.

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In reaching decisions on these questions, the significance for career planning and the possibility of observing reliably the trait under consideration are the criteria that will be followed. A continuing research program will be needed to insure that the proper knowledges, skills, and behaviors are being measured and recorded.

B. What methods of evaluation should be used? Objective measures should be employed wherever and whenever possible. Normally, objective examinations can readily be devised for testing the degree to which substantive knowledge has been acquired. Essay examinations or written reports have their purposes, but the core of any evaluation of "academic" learning should be the objective test. In addition to individual standings based upon objective tests, the instructor should be permitted to express his own evaluations of the student's achievement, based upon whatever information or impressions are available to him. Performance tests of skills acquired are generally difficult and time-consuming, and should be used only where there is ample justification for the effort that will be required.

Both systematic and incidental observations of behavior or personality characteristics should be incorporated in an evaluation system, each clearly labelled for what it is. Systematic observations may be expressed as ratings obtained either from instructors or from fellow students. The principle to follow is to obtain as many independent ratings as possible for each trait rated.

For characteristics of particular importance to the Agency (e.g., security-mindedness), extreme deviations can be brought out by simple "Yes-No" questions, recognizing that the questions will elicit significant information only in rare cases.

C. How can the results of training evaluation be made most meaningful? This can be achieved through the use of several techniques:

1. Making the information explicit. Clear and unambiguous language is used. Information is clearly identified for what it is: objective test, instructors' evaluation of achievement, systematic ratings, or incidental observations.

2. Providing means of interpretation and comparison. This can be accomplished through the accumulation of norms for the tests and the evaluations given, so that a person's record can be compared not only with those in his own class but to those in several classes, say the last four or five. As a means of further improving interpretations, results can be made consistent from class to class and from course to course. To do this, it is necessary to take into account differences in learning ability (as measured by the pre-training test battery) and to follow the principle that

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insofar as the several basic courses overlap in subject matter, the same examinations or examination questions will be used. Information from these sources can be used to "calibrate" standards among courses and classes.

3. Correlating the information for successive courses. A mechanism should be set up to systematically combine the various evaluations for the same student in order to make pertinent career recommendations. The A/E Staff should be responsible for this.

4. Education of all concerned with the training program and its evaluations. Not only should appropriate manuals and other materials be prepared for instructors and consumers, but there should be a continuous interchange of information among them and the A/E Staff.

D. What policies should govern the distribution and use of the evaluation report? The major consideration here is the morale of the students and instructors. The latter needs to be sure his evaluations will not be misused. The former must have confidence in the fairness of the operation of the system. The "need to know" principle should be followed here. Since some decisions made as a result of training evaluations may be as serious for the individual as those following a full psychological assessment, certain kinds of information should probably be presented only on face-to-face contact with the consumer. Any special consolidation of the reports probably should fall into this category.

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